



TITLE:

<Articles>Search for One's Voice in
the World beyond What One Can
See : Close Analysis of the Obscure
in Film

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CITATION:

KATO, RINA. <Articles>Search for One's Voice in the World beyond What One Can See :
Close Analysis of the Obscure in Film. 臨床教育人間学 2019, 14: 69-76

ISSUE DATE:

2019-08-09

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/244258>

RIGHT:

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Search for One's Voice in the World beyond What One Can See: Close Analysis of the Obscure in Film

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*This paper explores the problem of search for one's own voice in the ordinary life by analysis of the films *Stella Dallas* and *Still Walking*, with references to Stanley Cavell's reading. By focusing on the obscure in the relationship between the self and the other, or transcendence, expressed especially in conversation and behaviour, the importance of ratification supported by 'reading between lines' and the therapeutic mode of thought 'as if, that is, a type of belief in transcendence, will be revealed. This is an alternative to the scientific demonstrative mode of thought. Through the analysis, in conclusion, this paper discusses the idea that the awareness of the world that one can see is not everything and its educational implication.*

INTRODUCTION

What can we call real? Socrates presented the Theory of Form or Ideas and then he argued that the ideal form, which does not exist in our world, is the very true and the most real (Standish, 2018) because it is 'unchanging, timeless and indestructible' (ibid.). Let me change the previous question a little: What is the real in the process of the human transformation? When we think about our real ordinary life, we realize that our mode of living in the world is obscure. The word 'obscure' is contrary to Socrates's definition of real; notwithstanding this, there are some Socrates-style discourses in the field of education that engage in the idea of human transformation. For example, we sometimes require objectivity in learning evaluation; but in the relationship or involvement between people, is it real to put a high value on transparency and sign a contract where we can recognize what we approve and express to each other? If the relation between teachers and students in the educational field where they interact with each other and transform themselves is logical and its aim is to grasp others in this way, there would be viewpoints overlooked and taken lightly in the world that loses sight of the obscure that exists in our ordinary life.

In this paper, to explore this problem, we analyse two films *Stella Dallas* and *Still Walking* (*Aruitemo Aruitemo*) which describe the very ordinary life and suggest human transformations through the conversations based on the ordinary language. We can find human transformations in the journey of oblivion, repression, discovery, groping, in the trial and error of their own voice. We analyse in detail some conversations and behaviours which the characters' voices express in each film; we also refer to their similarity beyond the boundary between these films. Through this analysis, we present an alternative mode of thought or sense of language to the scientific demonstrative sense of language and consider its educational implication.

READING BETWEEN LINES

In this section, we analyse *Stella Dallas*, focusing on Stella's transformation. Especially, we

analyse the painful processes and conversations related to it.

Stella's pain: criticism of Cavell

Stanley Cavell presents an alternative to the story of self-sacrifice in her apparent choice to walk away from the world which she had longed for and lived in. The interpretation of self-sacrifice assumes that Stella is oblivious to her shocking appearance—just like a Christmas tree, as Linda Williams says (Cavell, 1996, p. 201). He argues that Stella understands the effect of her clothes and 'her spectacle is part of her strategy for separation Laurel from her' (ibid.). In the film, Stella's voice, expressed symbolically as Stella's taste, is excluded from herself by her husband's voice. The event on Christmas night clearly showed this matter. She changes her clothes to a simple black dress, which suits his taste to welcome him, demanding approval from him on the night. He is satisfied with her behaviour and therefore talks with her tenderly and gently. It seems to be the sign of recovery of their relationship, however, his attitude changes suddenly when Ed Munn breaks into the room. In this scene, she seems to succeed in establishing a relationship where they give careful consideration each other, but it is not truly successful because the relationship achieved here is not one where they have serious conversation. He gives his kindness as compensation for her conformity to his taste, that is conditional approval and fake conversation which is offered within his dominant mode of thought, which she is forced to assimilate to. Here, Cavell says 'Stella learns the futility of appealing to the taste of those who have no taste for her' (p. 202).

However, is there something overlooked in Cavell's reading? Namely, what does Cavell think about the pain of walking away from the world that one has longed for? Cavell mentions the transformation from mourning to ecstasy in Thoreau's idea related to the pain that goes with transformation. According to Cavell, Anita Sokolsky has a critical opinion about this and argues that Stella's transformation is not one from mourning to ecstasy but one from melancholia to mourning (p. 221). Cavell regards this as fruitful reformulation, but he makes the following two points. Firstly, the idea of ecstasy 'is still part of the work of mourning, not a sign that mourning is all at once over' (ibid.). Secondly, the grief of mourning is not Freud's idea of melancholia (ibid.). However, he just comments these points and he does not discuss their interpretation in relation to Stella's transformation in the film. Let me carry out an in-depth discussion.

On Christmas night, 'Stella learns the futility of appealing to the taste of those who have no taste for her' (p. 202). It is Cavell's reading that Stella realizes that the world she has longed for is not her taste (p. 212), but does this realization make it possible for her to switch her way of thinking and then immediately strategize this by provoking people's sense of hate on purpose, as Cavell says? Is there something overlooked in this interpretation? Of course, Cavell also pays attention to the fact that mourning is not over at once and that one cannot get liberation from suffering as mentioned above. However, by her realization on Christmas night, what will become of her 'self' who has set her goal by the criteria in the world that she has longed for and conformed to, and has acted for the approval of her husband who belongs to the world. In other words, how can she justify and accept herself when she has trusted the world that is not her home before the revolution within herself happens by the realization? According to Cavell's reading, 'she from the beginning does not belong, here at what the world calls home' (p. 218)¹.

She walked away from the world after her marriage so that she can get closer to the new world she has longed for. However, it is not the world she can call her home either; she no longer finds her home anywhere. She feels as if she were left hanging, loses her place and this leads to the result that she denies herself, who until then had conformed to the criteria which are offered by the other. It means that her own trust in her choice and thought has collapsed and there are no reliable aspects within herself; she feels that she is empty. Now, how can such a person immediately start strategic responses to the world with one's feet on the ground?

Consequently, we can present an alternative interpretation by discussing Freud's idea of melancholia in relation to this emptiness provoked by the painful realization. Freud distinguishes sharply between melancholia and mourning. The crucial difference exists in the point that melancholia involves a reduction in the sense of self, such as self-recrimination or self-directed insults (Freud, 2005, p. 204). Whereas we are conscious of what we have lost in mourning, we cannot consciously grasp it and therefore we feel the emptiness of ourselves in melancholia (pp. 205-206). Based on this, we can think that Stella's mental condition through the realization on Christmas night is melancholia rather than mourning because her feeling of emptiness provokes her condition in which she cannot be conscious of what she lost, that means that she cannot take the fact that she lost a lot of things (home, approval from the other, trust in oneself and so on as mentioned above) well. Furthermore, it supports this interpretation to regard Stella's excessive costume not as her strategy but as the deconstruction of her ability. Her condition of the deconstruction of her knowledge about clothes massively authenticated by Mrs. Morrison and Stella's husband suggests deconstruction of herself symbolically. As suggested above, one does bear the pain that the word self-sacrifice implies when one walks away not only from the world that she is still longing for but also the world that she *was* longing for. Cavell underestimates the pain provided by the realization on Christmas night.

Ratification by the other

How, then, can Stella, who feels the emptiness of herself, search for her voice, bearing her pain? We can find a clue in the conversation between Stella and Mrs. Morrison after she has come back from the resort hotel. In this conversation, Mrs. Morrison talks to Stella tenderly and she gives careful consideration to the pain that Stella tries to walk away from her daughter for the sake of her daughter's, happiness. Though Stella does not explain this reason explicitly and she gives some fake reason such as her need for dancing and parties, Mrs. Morrison can read between lines. Moreover, she does not try to drag the real feeling out of Stella nor clarifying everything by force. Instead of this, she just says: 'You brought her up' and she accepts both Stella's lie and her decision to tell a lie. It means that their conversation is related to the mode of thought that receives the other in obscurity, rather than one that clarifies things comprehensively, and leads them to recognize themselves in each other. In addition, when we pay attention to their position of the faces, Mrs. Morrison looks at Stella's face, while, on the other hand, Stella looks toward camera or looks down; her eyes wander here and there. This implies that as Stella speaks to Mrs. Morrison she is trying to find her voice. She does not have her direction nor self-confidence but still she searches for her own voice supported by Mrs. Morrison's gaze.

As Cavell says, Stella's transformation is linked to the journey from conformity to self-reliance, as

in Emerson's idea (Cavell, 1996, p. 220). However, the conversation between women suggests that the self-reliance here does not mean the attitude that one just keeps going one's own way without taking the other into consideration. Cavell also comments on the close relation between self-reliance and ratification. The gaze from the screen of the window in the wedding hall implies the ratification by Mrs. Morrison and Laurel (p. 217). Mrs. Morrison opens the curtains in the wedding hall. This implies that Mrs. Morrison guesses the further possibility and gives her gaze though she does not know if Stella can recognize it (p. 213). She finds the further possibility beyond what they can see or the apparently settled facts and accepts those obscured things as they are. Then, as Cavell says, Stella's gaze is backed by Mrs. Morrison's, such a gaze called mother's gaze (p. 216). Stella finds ratification in the receptive experience of her, even if the other does not understand her whole self completely. The ratification is not a contract which specifies its contents in each category individually, nor the mutual recognition through which they know in what and how they recognize each other. One can have one's own motive to do something, in one's own right time and by one's own significance, when one receives a receptive experience, not by someone else's criteria nor the ones presented objectively as being apart from the context². This is the transformation and recovery of one's own voice supported by the ratification by the other.

THE THERAPEUTIC MODE OF THOUGHT 'AS IF'

In this section, we analyse the characters' conversation and behaviour related to transformation' like the previous section, in *Still Walking*. We may think that *Stella Dallas* highlights the heroine Stella's transformation because of its main story. In contrast to this, *Still Walking* does not highlight specific characters' voice and transformation. It describes a family whose members express their thoughts or feelings vaguely, have some secrets within their minds, and feel indebted to each other. The structure of the story does not thematise them nor show them to us directly and explicitly, but there is a lot of voice and transformation, indirectly and implicitly. Because I do not have the ability to analyse every voice, here we focus on and analyse the mode of thought suggested in the film frequently and Atsushi's transformation. The mode of thought lets us live in the world beyond what we can see.

Firstly, we enumerate four sequences related to the mode of thought: (1) Writing a letter to the rabbit who has passed away, which he and his classmates had at school. (2) Grandmother's talking to the grave when the family visit to her oldest son's grave. (3) Grandmother's talking to the butterfly which wandered into the house, seeing it as her oldest son, Junpei. (4) At night, Atsushi's talking to his birth father, who has passed away already, alone in the garden. Then we analyse these four sequences in detail in order.

In the first sequence, the rabbit which Atsushi and his classmates had in the school died. They are sad and one of the classmates proposes writing a letter to it, but Atsushi laughs at the proposal. He asks to his foster father, Ryota, what the point is of writing a letter which no one will read. Ryota is at a loss for words and then this conversation is over. Atsushi's question is related to the idea that our voice is useless unless it is recognized directly and explicitly by the one whom we wish to listen to our voice. It is based on the thought that things that no one recognizes clearly are the same as truly nothing and that doing anything for them has no meaning. Atsushi, who has such mode of thought, encounters the second and third shocking

events later. In the second sequence, he visits Junpei's grave with his parents and grandmother. It is very hot day. Grandmother pours water on the grave and talks to it, 'It was so hot all day. The water must feel good', as if the son were there. Atsushi looks at her marvelling her behaviour. At the night, he encounters another mysterious incident. In the third sequence, while they take a bath in turn, a butterfly wanders into the living room. Grandmother sees it as her late son and is absorbed in it like a woman possessed. She chases after it and talks to it seriously 'You followed us home from his grave, right? Junpei? Junpei?'. Atsushi and his mother just look at her silently. They must be strange events for Atsushi who has the mode of thought mentioned above. For him, the grave is just an object which does not move or respond to us and the butterfly is just one of the insects. He merely takes what he sees as it is. However, in the conversation between his mother and him after the third sequence, he encounters an unexpected view in his mode of thought. The conversation is as follows:

Atsushi: Grandma was acting strange earlier.

Mother: It just seemed that way to her.

Atsushi: Even though he's gone?

Mother: Even when they die, people don't really go away. Your father's here. Right inside you. Half of you is made of your father. Half of you is from me.

Atsushi: What about Ryo, then?

Mother: Ryo will become a part of you too. Slowly but surely.

What he learns here is related to the view towards transcendence. It is Charles Taylor's idea of faith in transcendence in a secular age that gives us the clue. In a secular age, faith in god is one option among others rather than the unchallenged option (Taylor, 2007). The exclusive, self-sufficient humanism is emerging in secularism and people tend to accept 'no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing' (p. 18). Living within this flourishing means that people live in an economic system of exchange and sufficiency. In the system, we can control and use the object well. We take everything as the consumption of substances for our flourishing in order to overcome uncertainty in the world, requiring transparency and usefulness. Such a mode of thought never aspires to anything that it cannot control nor reduce to the frame of the thought. Now, we can see the similarity between this exclusive, self-sufficient mode of thought and Atsushi's thought—things that no one recognizes clearly are the same as truly nothing and acting on them has no meaning. Let me continue our inquiry about this.

One who sets oneself in the center of the world and lives in the world demonstrated by scientific language is in perfect oblivion of the further view. The further view does not seem to be linked to the belief in the existence of the god or the soul of the dead based on solid logical proof. It is rather linked to a mode of thought and belief in something obscure beyond approval or disapproval of proof of existence. Thus, we present the mode of thought of the belief, related to the search for one's own voice, that is different from the belief in the existence of any transcendence logically based on positive evidence. It is different from belief in existence based on logical proof to write to the dead rabbit and talk to the grave or the butterfly seeing it as the deceased. As mother says, 'even when they die, people don't really go away.' Even if we cannot prove its existence, we can still believe it. What is not recognized explicitly may not be existence,

but it does not mean that it is same as nothing and emptiness.

This is related to the way of thinking about our relationship to objects such as the other, things and world. Antoine Berman (2014) focuses on the difference between translation in an article about technology and one in a literary work in his argument about the ethics of the translation. The aim in the article about technology is to transmit information and deliver the message accurately. On the other hand, 'the work does not transmit any information even if it has some information. Because the work leads us to some new worlds or experiences' (Berman, 2014, p. 85). To some extent, indeed, the literary work has room for a reader's summarizing the subjects and deciding the theme. Being summarized and decided, the theme, the substance of the work, becomes fixed and the summary and theme apart from the work transmitted to one. Through this, the work has turned into merely information. However, there should be, in nature, a poetical, essential quality that cannot be reduced to information in the literary work. In this sense, Berman suggests that the work is not a set of messages but a profound text (ibid.). This idea of the contrast between message and text can be the clue to considering the relationship to the objects in question. We cannot grasp what does not exist and is not recognized nor gain any information from it. To control and grasp the objects ends in failure. However, it does not mean that what does not exist has no meaning and no effect for our life. Even if we cannot prove the existence, we can believe in it. Therefore, we present such belief as the mode of thought 'as if'. To believe as if X were Y has the possibility to expand our exclusive and self-sufficient view. To approach something obscure through the mode of thought 'as if' is to see the world as a hypothesis and act in such way. One does not live only in logic or reasoning. Therefore, we can call it a kind of therapy. One can find one's own voice in the relationship to the world by expressing the voice in the way of 'as if'.

Now we can regard the fourth sequence as the one that suggests such a transformation or recovery of the voice. Atsushi talks to his late father. In addition, because he talks as if he was reading a letter out, this sequence is linked to the first sequence—that is the letter to the late father and the letter to the dead rabbit. Here he seems to gain or recover his voice. On the way home from the grave, his mother finds a butterfly. Though she talks about the memory when he and his father go out to catch a butterfly, he says he does not remember that. However, it is revealed for him to remember that well in the fourth sequence. Besides, when his grandfather asks him the reason why he wants to be a piano tuner, he says that 'because I like my music teacher'. However, in the fourth sequence, he said that 'I want to be a piano tuner *just like you, Dad*'. Though we cannot make an assertion that the former reason is lie, we can see that Atsushi repressed his feelings to his late father. By this analysis, we can see that Atsushi who lost the existence of his father tries to abandon his memory with, his love of and his longing for his father. However, accepting the obscure, he can get the relationship to what he cannot see through his encounters with her grandmother's behaviour and the conversation between him and his mother.

CONCLUSION

We organize the analysis of the two films and present a mode of thought that cannot be expressed by the scientific demonstrative sense of language in the way of responding our question in the introduction. Then, we suggest its educational significance briefly.

In both these films, one does not search for one's own voice by expressing one's feelings and pains to the other and then signing a contract with the other where they recognize the contents. This relationship is based on the thought that the relationship to the other can be reduced to a store of information about the other and therefore the understanding of the other is achieved at the maximum. This thought overlooks the real found by analysis of the mode of thought in the conversations and behaviour in the films. The real mode of thought that works on the web of our ordinary language involves awareness of that the world we can see is not everything. In *Stella Dallas*, Mrs. Morrison finds a further possibility beyond what she can see, or the apparently settled facts, and reads between lines. This attitude helps to recover Stella's voice. One can find one's voice through a receptive experience by the other who gets such awareness. On the other hand, in *Still Walking*, Atsushi recovers his voice through the recovery of the relationship to what he cannot see. One who searches for one's voice recovers it through his or her awareness. As suggested above, in both the self who searches for the voice and the other who ratifies and accepts it, we can show the importance of this awareness. One has voice beyond logic.

Finally, we suggest the implication of this awareness in the field of education where the students are oblivious of, repress, and grope for their own voice. For example, the teacher who can find further possibilities beyond what he can see give careful consideration to the reason why the student is often late for school or defies them, not limited to just scolding him. Perhaps, they can pay attention to the student who is diligent and follow them because there is a possibility that he just conforms to the expectations from his surroundings and represses his own voice. On the other hand, the students who can find further possibilities have the chance of self-criticism, as in Emmanuel Lévinas³. The mode of thought that sets the self in the center of the world and controls the objects regards the event that is contrary to one's wishes as 'failure'. Though one can get a kind of chance of self-criticism through such failure, the awareness can make one self-critical through another type of experience. It means that one can get a view decentered by humility—the awareness that what one can see is not everything. It makes the student realize the fact that he has already reduced the otherness of the other to his frame of the thought when he realizes it, and this then evokes a sense of 'shame'. In this way, the student can consider his or her ethical relationship to the other.

NOTES

1. According to Cavell's analysis, Stella's original family is not comfortable for her because of 'the wooden, shadowy father delivering ugly orders; the monosyllabic, helpless mother; the noisy, nervous brother' (Cavell, 1996, p. 218).
2. We may find its similarity to Socrates's idea in Plato's *Phaedrus* to some extent. Socrates says '(s)uch discourses should be called his own legitimate children, first the discourse he may have discovered already within himself and then its sons and brothers who may have grown naturally in other souls insofar as these are worthy; to the rest, he turns his back' (Plato, 1995, p. 84). It can be translated to the following. One has one's own voice and can find the other who can share one's taste. Furthermore, one can walk away from those who does not share one's taste. This idea is similar to Stella's search for her voice because she finds Mrs. Morrison a woman who accepts Stella's voice and finds her husband a man who does not share her voice and therefore she walks away from him. However, there is still room for discussion about Socrates's order—'first' and 'and then'—because Stella comes to have her voice supported Mrs. Morrison's ratification and acceptance.
3. The discussion about self-criticism, especially 'failure' and 'shame', borrow from Lévinas (Lévinas, 1991, pp.

83-84).

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